

Soviet Congress Rules Lithuania Vote Invalid

Reuters

MOSCOW — The Congress of People's Deputies voted Thursday that Lithuania's declaration of independence was invalid and asserted that Soviet law was still in force in the breakaway Baltic republic.

But Mikhail S. Gorbachev, in a press conference after the parliamentary session ended, appeared to soften his earlier statements that the Kremlin would not negotiate with the rebel Lithuanians.

Mr. Gorbachev also suggested that it was possible for Lithuania to secede from the Soviet Union — over time, and by means of a referendum.

"Yes, I said we won't have talks," he said, "but we will have mutually respectful dialogue. That will take some time. My idea is to preserve the union on the basis of a different approach to each republic, on the basis of a new union treaty."

"If, in the final analysis, on the basis of a referendum, the population of Lithuania should decide to secede," he added, "it should be by a lengthy process which must include the realization of interests both of Lithuania and of the U.S.S.R."

The resolution on Lithuania, introduced by the parliamentary leadership and recommended by Mr. Gorbachev, was approved 1,463 to 94. It gave Mr. Gorbachev, newly elected as a president with expanded powers, responsibility for "ensuring the lawful rights of every person" in Lithuania.

The Lithuanian legislature declared independence on Sunday. Mr. Gorbachev denounced the declaration on Tuesday as illegal and invalid, but the Kremlin has so far made no move to enforce its will.

The Congress said the Lithuanian declaration was invalid under Articles 74 and 75 of the Soviet constitution, which affirm the primacy of Soviet laws over those of the republics.

"Confirming the right of every republic to secede, the Congress rules that until the law determining the order of secession is adopted, the decisions taken by Lithuania's Sejm on March 10 to 12 are invalid," its resolution said.

Earlier there had been fierce debate over the Lithuania resolution, which was introduced by Rafik Nishanov, chairman of the Council of Nationalities, one of the two chambers of the Supreme Soviet, the standing parliament. The Congress of People's Deputies elects the Supreme Soviet.

He said that he and Yevgeni M. Primakov, chairman of the other Supreme Soviet chamber, the Council of the Union, had prepared the resolution after talks with the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, the parliament leadership.

Debate began immediately, with numerous legislators contesting the terms of the resolution.

"Does this mean that we are to ignore the will of Lithuania expressed through the highest body in the republic?" asked Yuri Boldyrev, a deputy from Leningrad.

"It seems to me that we have just elected a president," said Alexander Obolensky, a radical deputy from Kaliningrad. "If there were any real danger or threat he could take decisions himself."

Mr. Gorbachev has said that a government panel, headed by Prime Minister Nikolai I. Ryzhkov, will study the Lithuania issue and announce public policy.